

A Department of Correction Success Story

By Java Ahmed and Rich Larsen

Donahue Says...

"...a gentleman like this ex-offender who has gone through our system, ultimately took advantage of making a difference in his own world, and life, and as a result is attempting to recover from his mistakes."



Mark Nicholson talks about his life..

On March 23, the Advisory Board held its semi-annual meeting at the Wabash Correctional Facility. Commissioner J. David Donahue kicked off the session by talking about the many programs the Department of Correction plans to implement at many of its facilities. The session was attended by approximately 30 people and two local TV stations. The guest speaker, Mark Nicholson, gave an inspirational talk on his life behind bars and his plans for the future.

"The Department is committed to tracking and measuring successes. If you don't keep score; you're only practicing," said Donahue to the advisory board. "We want to focus on recidivism." The Department's goal is make sure that all inmates get the right opportunities to develop skills so they can reintegrate in society. As we move forward, we need to assess the existing programs and make sure that the needs of the inmates are met. We need to find solutions to ensure that employability in our environment is thriving. We do not and will not tolerate idleness.

Work release, classification, community corrections and transitional programming were topics addressed in the session. Former inmate, Mark Nicholson, commended the Commissioner on his attitude in leading

this agency and for giving inmates a chance to succeed.

"I am not a success story, I am a work in progress," said former inmate, Mark Nicholson. Nicholson served over ten years. During those long years, Nicholson was determined to turn his life around and education was the key. If the prison was on lock-down he read in his cell, books of all kinds. He never thought of the next crime, but wanted to find ways to better himself.

“The Bible is my inspiration today, as it was yesterday,” said Nicholson.

Nicholson also went back to school while in prison, earning a college degree. Nicholson offered suggestions to the board on staff and offender communications, educational opportunities and helping inmates transition back to society. Nicholson also stressed that positive change comes from within and he is determined to make the world a better place. Education did not end for Nicholson when he was released from prison nearly two years ago. He struggled, trying to make ends meet and was even homeless for a time, but today he is a first-year law student.

Donahue told the reporters " ...a gentleman like this ex-offender who has gone through our system, ultimately took advantage of making a difference in his own world, and life, and as a result is attempting to recover from his mistakes."

Mark Nicholson plans to devote his life, his "work in progress" to helping the less fortunate. He told the advisory board a law degree will help him achieve his goals.